

Chicago Panther Killings Are Ruled Justifiable

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CHICAGO, Jan. 21—A special coroner's jury ruled today that the shooting by Chicago police of two Black Panthers was justifiable.

It found that police officers fired their guns during a Dec. 4 raid in the "reasonable belief" that it was necessary to prevent death or bodily harm to themselves.

The predawn raid on a Black Panther Party apartment on Chicago's West Side ended with the death of Fred Hampton, Illinois chairman of the party, and Mark Clark, a Panther organizer from Peoria.

Their relatives were in the courtroom today when the verdict was delivered and regis-

tered strong disapproval. When Cook County Coroner Andrew Toman read the report calling the shootings "justifiable," Clark's mother stood up and murmured, "It was not."

Hampton's mother sat shaking her head slowly. She said afterward that the six jurors were "all rotten people" and declared, "I hope they all have got children and that they know how I feel about it."

The Hampton family and Panther Party members have insisted that both young men were deliberately murdered by the police and that Hampton was shot while he was still in bed.

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The police testified during the two-week inquest that they were serving a search warrant for illegal weapons when they were fired on first by Clark from inside the apartment. They described a wild shootout following the initial exchange of gunfire at the front door.

Widespread doubts about the police version had forced appointment of the special blue-ribbon coroner's jury charged with hearing the evidence and determining the probable cause of the deaths.

However, the seven Panthers who survived the raid refused to testify about their version of what happened in

the shabby, brick apartment building early on Dec. 4.

All seven are charged with attempted murder of the policemen who staged the raid and they contended they should not be required to tell their story until they are tried on the criminal charges.

A Cook County grand jury presently is determining whether the seven survivors should be indicted for attempted murder.

A federal grand jury is investigating the case from a different angle. It is hearing evidence from a special team headed by Assistant U.S. Attorney General Jerris Leonard on whether the raiding police violated the civil rights of the Panthers.

The six-man inter-racial jury deliberated for about five hours today after hearing final testimony. The panel members handed up their unanimous verdict, listened silently as it was read, and then left without answering questions.

The inquest verdict has no legal effect on other court actions. In Cook County coroner's inquests, the jury has the option of finding deaths to be justifiable homicide, accidental homicide, manslaughter, murder, or attributable to undetermined causes. Any

such finding would not have amounted to a criminal charge.

A final witness this morning was Dr. George Christopolous, a coroner's chemist, who testified he found no traces of drugs in Hampton's blood stream during two separate autopsies. The account conflicted with an unofficial report by a private pathologist, Dr. Victor Levine, who had been retained by the Hampton family to conduct an independent autopsy. Levine said he found large traces of Seconal, a sleep-inducing drug, in Hampton's blood. The Panthers have claimed that someone drugged Hampton the night of the raid.

An attorney representing the Panthers, James Montgomery, said after the verdict was announced that he will file a civil suit against "the persons responsible for these deaths." He did not say who will be sued. The 14 policemen in the raid were on permanent assignment to the office of State's Attorney Edward V. Hanrahan.

Referring to the inquest, Montgomery told newsmen, "This was nothing but a well-rehearsed theatrical performance to vindicate the police officers. The state's attorney was trying to vindicate the officers in the public mind."